GMA Update – Resources for Designating and Conserving
AGRICULTURE, FOREST, AND MINERAL RESOURCE LANDS

Overview

All counties and cities in Washington state are required to designate resource lands - RCW 36.70A.170. Counties and cities designating resource lands should act to conserve those resource lands designated, as these resource materials are important to support local economies and development needs. Those jurisdictions that are fully planning under the GMA must adopt development regulations to conserve the designated resource lands - RCW 36.70A.060 (1). Jurisdictions planning for critical areas and resource lands (CARL) only under the GMA must designate resource lands, and are encouraged but are not required to adopt development regulations to conserve these resource lands. All jurisdictions are encouraged to use non-regulatory measures such as incentives, education, and partnerships to promote conservation and stewardship of these lands.

All jurisdictions must require that all plats, short plats, and permits issued for building or development on, or within 500 feet of, lands designated as resource lands, contain a notice that the subject property is within or near designated resource lands, on which a variety of activities may occur that are not compatible with residential development - RCW 36.70A.060 (2).

Any fully planning counties or cities desiring to designate agriculture or forest resource lands within an urban growth area must adopt a program to purchase or transfer developments rights (PDR/TDR) - RCW 36.70A.060 (4). Such a PDR or TDR program can help ensure the designated resource lands remain economically viable.

Jurisdictions are encouraged to work cooperatively with adjacent jurisdictions and conservation organizations to ensure program compatibility and ensure adequate resource lands are designated to ensure the long-term economic sustainability of the resource industries.

Agriculture resource lands are very important to the state economy[1], with a $42 billion food and agriculture industry employing 160,000 people and contributing ~13% percent to the state's economy. Nearly $9.3 billion in food and agricultural products were exported through state ports in 2007, the third largest total in the U.S. Washington State is the nation's number one producer of apples, cherries, and pears, and the number two producer of potatoes and grapes. Agriculture lands cover about 15 million acres, or one-third of the state. Agriculture varies widely on these lands, with large-scale production of milk, wheat, meat, hay, nursery and greenhouse products, and major producers of hops, farm forest products, fish and shellfish, raspberries and mint oils[2]. In addition, small-scale and also organic agriculture are expanding and growing fresh produce for a growing number of farmers markets, community supported agriculture groups, schools, and institutions.

Number of Organic Farms: 1988—63 farms 1997—290 farms 2002—560 farms 2006—634 farms

Organic Acreage Certified by WSDA: 1988—2,000 acres 1997—12,000 acres 2002—46,000 acres 2006—74,925 acres

[1] Washington State Dept. of Agriculture website
[2] USDA 2007 Census of Agriculture

Forest resource lands are important to provide wood for building construction and furnishings, fuel, foliage and other non-wood products, including valuable medicines. Forest lands are also important areas for recreation and animal habitat. In 2005 Washington State was the nation's number two producer of softwood lumber, with almost all timber harvesting occurring on non-federal forest lands. In 2006, gross business income from forestry and logging equaled $2.1 billion. There are 22.1 million acres of forest lands, which is close to one-half of the state. Forest lands ownership is 25% in National Forest, 18% in federally protected parks, wilderness and wildlife refuges, 7% owned by Native American tribes, 2% owned by counties and cities, 12% owned by the state land trust, 21% owned by industrial private corporations, and 15% owned by nonindustrial private landowners[3]. Forest lands in the last two of these categories located in low lying valleys near population centers are the lands most at risk of conversion to other, primarily residential uses.

Mineral resource lands rely on the presence of valuable minerals and not primarily on productive agricultural or forest soils for resource production. Also unlike designated agriculture and forest resource lands, mines may be temporary uses, in that minerals may be depleted at a designated mine site, which is then reclaimed for a subsequent use, and the resource land designation is removed. Minerals include aggregates like sand and gravel, and valuable metallic substances. Washington State construction projects consume nearly 77 million tons of aggregates a year. The mineral industry earns roughly $800 million per year producing sand and gravel, crushed stone, coal, metals, and industrial minerals such as diatomite, clay, silica, and olivine. Aggregate products are most commonly used within 25-35 miles of a mine, as transportation is nearly 40% of the cost to produce and market aggregates.[4]

Resource Lands Review Actions and Issues

Public involvement - Information is available and distributed as means for citizens to participate in the review, evaluation, and revision, if necessary, of your policies, development regulations, and ordinances for natural resource lands.

Assemble all current and relevant maps and data relating to natural resource lands associated with your jurisdiction, and if appropriate, the surrounding region.

Review existing designations of agriculture, forest, and mineral resource lands of long-term commercial significance for adequate support of these natural resource industries.

Assess issues and economic conditions affecting resource lands industries and land conservation to prevent conversion of designated resource lands to other uses.

Contact neighboring jurisdictions and conservation organizations to discuss opportunities for collaboration and consistency in protecting designated resource lands.

[3] WFPA Forest Facts & Figures, 2007

[4] The Aggregate Industry in Washington: Economic Impact and Importance, October 2003; Washington Aggregates and Concrete Association website (accessed Aug. 14, 2009.)

Development regulations, if required, apply buffers or setbacks to adjacent parcels to avoid conflicts with resource production on designated resource lands.

Consider docketed requests to amend the comprehensive plan or development regulations that designate and conserve natural resource lands.

Opportunities and procedures are available for designating new resource lands to serve future natural resource needs.

Resources

Department of Commerce - Growth Management Act (GMA), Minimum Guidelines to Classify Agriculture, Forest, Mineral Lands and Critical Areas - Chapter 365-190 WAC

AGRICULTURE

Washington State Office of Farmland Preservation

Washington Tilth webpage

Washington Sustainable Food and Farming Network webpage

WSU Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources

Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers Association webpage

Natural Resources Conservation Service webpage for Washington state

Farm Service Agency webpage for Washington state

Land Use, Value, and Management Resources from USDA

American Farmland Trust

Washington State Farm Bureau

Washington State Conservation Commission

FOREST

Washington State Department of Natural Resources Forest Practices webpage

Washington Forest Protection Association

Washington State Forestland Database

USDA Forest Service - State and Private Forestry

MINERAL

Washington Department of Natural Resources webpage on Geology and Earth Sciences

Washington Department of Natural Resources webpage on Earth Resources Mapping
The mining industry uses DNR maps and publications, along with other reports from the DNR library, to help find new resources. In the past, the Geology Division has done many mineral and other resource inventories. Recent emphasis has been on locating the sand, gravel, and quarry rock resources needed for highway and infrastructure construction. DNR has produced sand and gravel resource maps that are useful for guiding zoning decisions and balanced resource planning at the local level. To date about 10 percent of the state has been mapped for sand, gravel, and crushed rock resource potential.

Ideas for Strengthening Your Resource Lands Conservation Efforts

Incentives

- Does your jurisdiction provide incentives to encourage stewardship and conservation of resource lands? Incentives include, but are not limited to, using the current use taxation provisions of Chapter 84.34 RCW, the optional Public Benefit Rating System to set priorities for open space land conservation, and purchase or transfer of developments rights programs (PDR and TDR) to provide cash to landowners for conservation easements.
- Encouraged to work with local conservation districts.
  WA State Conservation Commission is developing and implementing an incentives model approach for natural resource lands. The goal is to implement a program to improve the coordination of service delivery of incentive-based programs for landowners in targeted areas of the state. The WSCC would work with the conservation district in a targeted area to convene a local group of stakeholders and governmental and tribal agencies to develop a focused, comprehensive approach to systematically deliver incentive programs to landowners.

Monitoring

- Does your jurisdiction have methods for monitoring how well natural resource lands designations and regulations and other implementation techniques are conserving resource lands? This could include GIS-based land use monitoring, reports from industry associations, and reports from non-profit organizations active in land conservation.